

Consumer Reports Health BEST BUY DRUGS

Free Guidance for Consumers on Prescription Medicines



NEWS UPDATE

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Dear Jim Pierson,

Should you take muscle relaxers for muscle pain?

Has your New Year's resolution to get in shape left you with a few aches and pains? Or maybe your lower back muscles are acting up again. Muscle spasms or even sore muscles can leave many of us asking our doctors for medication to ease the pain. Indeed, doctors prescribed more than \$1 billion worth of muscle relaxers in 2008.

But for conditions like these, a muscle relaxer is not necessarily your best, first bet. In fact, [a recent analysis by Consumer Reports Best Buy drugs](#) found that muscle relaxers are no better than over-the-counter pain relievers like acetaminophen (Tylenol and generics), aspirin, ibuprofen (Advil and generics), or naproxen (Aleve and generics) at relieving muscle pain. And, muscle relaxers can have dangerous side effects, such as addiction and sedation.

Before you try a drug, consider other options too, like heating pads, exercise therapy, biofeedback or progressive relaxation, massage, yoga, and acupuncture. In fact, a recent Consumer Reports survey of lower back pain sufferers found that hands-on treatments like chiropractic care and massage therapy were extremely helpful in relieving pain.

[Read on](#) to understand more detailed information about the safety and efficacy of muscle relaxers, and to see if there are nondrug treatments that may also work for you. People with cerebral palsy and multiple sclerosis may find muscle relaxers effective for treating involuntary muscle contractions that can inhibit their ability to walk, sleep, work or even function normally. Our report covers these conditions as well.

Off-label drug report

Quinine to relieve leg cramps: common use but not recommended

If you have leg cramps during the night, your doctor might prescribe quinine (Qualaquin) — even though the U.S. Food and Drug Administration has only approved it to treat one condition: malaria. Since the 1940s, doctors have prescribed quinine because there are no other reliable treatments for leg cramps. But, even after multiple safety alerts from the FDA about the risks of quinine and its limited effectiveness, the practice is still widespread.

You should know that there is little convincing scientific evidence that quinine actually helps leg cramps. And, not surprisingly, the FDA recently reported again that the risk of severe side effects from quinine outweighed any potential benefit of taking it for leg cramps.

[Read on](#) for more detail about the use of quinine to treat leg cramps and other conditions.

For additional information on more than [200 prescription drugs](#), alternatives to high-priced drugs and Best Buy selections for the most common, chronic medical conditions, visit ConsumerReportsHealth.org/BestBuyDrugs.